

# FACT SHEET

## Partial Deletion of Monticello Mill Tailings Site From the National Priorities List



United States  
Department of Energy  
Grand Junction Office

July 2003

*The U.S. Department of Energy has completed the cleanup of the Non-Surface and Ground-Water Impacted Peripheral Properties that are part of Operable Unit II of the Monticello (Utah) Mill Tailings Site. These properties can now be removed from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's National Priorities List. This fact sheet provides a description of the project and explains the deletion process.*

### Background

A mill was operated in Monticello, Utah, from 1942 through 1959 to process both uranium and vanadium ores for the Federal Government (see Figure 1). Approximately 900,000 tons of ore was processed prior to termination of mill operations in 1960. The plant was dismantled by 1964.

Mill tailings, the radioactive sandlike material that remains after uranium has been extracted from the ore, were stockpiled on the millsite. Tailings were subsequently transported from the millsite onto peripheral properties by wind and onto downstream properties by water via Montezuma Creek. Tailings were also used throughout the city of Monticello for construction purposes. Limited amounts of tailings were used as fill for open lands; as backfill around water, sewer, and electrical lines; and as sand mix in concrete, plaster, and mortar.

The main contaminants of concern in tailings are radium-226 and associated radon gas, a decay product of radium. Exposure to radiation emanating from soils contaminated with uranium mill tailings and inhalation of radon gas posed potential threats to human health and the environment.

### National Priorities List

In response to growing concern about health and environmental risks posed by hazardous waste sites, Congress established the Superfund Program in 1980 and the Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act of 1986 to clean up these sites. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) administers the Superfund Program in cooperation with individual states and tribal governments. The National Priorities List is a list of top-priority hazardous waste sites that are eligible for extensive, long-term cleanup under the Federal Superfund Program. All sites under the Superfund Program are regulated by

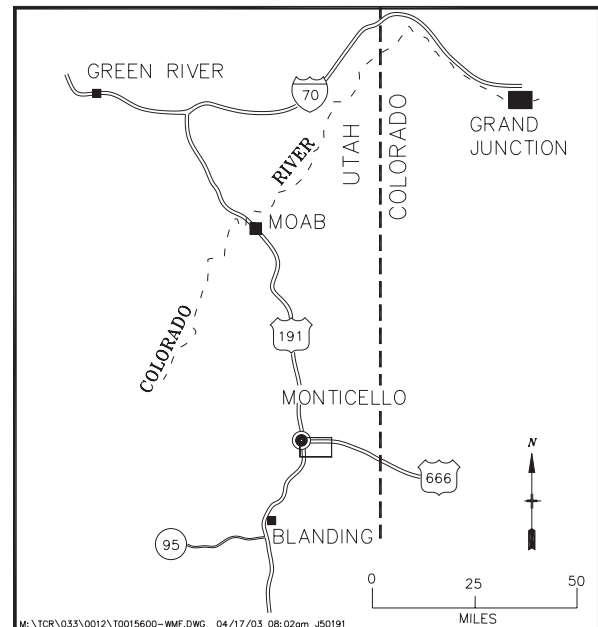


Figure 1. Monticello, Utah, Location

the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA). All cleanup activities must satisfy the requirements of this act.

EPA tries to identify and locate entities that are responsible for contributing to the creation of waste on National Priorities List sites. EPA first considers those entities to provide funding for the cleanup activities. If those entities are unable to provide funding, then the Superfund Program provides funds for the remediation. The U.S. Atomic Energy Commission, the predecessor agency to the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), was the primary recipient of products from the Monticello mill. Therefore, DOE has been responsible for funding and completing the remediation of contamination generated by the Monticello mill.

The mill tailings contamination from the Monticello millsite resulted in the establishment of two National



EPA placed the Monticello Mill Tailings (USDOE) on its National Priorities List in November 1989. The Monticello Mill Tailings Site is located in and adjacent to the City of Monticello, San Juan County, Utah. The site consists of the former millsite and 34 private- and public-owned properties with a total area of approximately 2 square miles. The remedial work for the Monticello Mill Tailings Site was initially divided into two operable units: OU I (the former millsite and on-site repository) and OU II (properties near the former millsite, referred to as peripheral properties, primarily contaminated with windblown tailings). OU II also included downstream properties with contaminated sediment from Montezuma Creek. A third operable unit (OU III) was designated in 1990 and consisted of the millsite and those downgradient properties with surface water and/or ground water contamination.

## Partial Site Deletion

EPA, the State of Utah (through the Utah Department of Environmental Quality), and DOE agreed in March 2000 that deletion of the Monticello Mill Tailings Site from the National Priorities List would be accomplished with partial deletions. The first area to be deleted is designated as the OU II Non-Surface and Ground-Water Impacted Peripheral Properties. These peripheral properties occupy approximately 1 square mile within OU II and consist of 22 of the 34 total properties that constitute OU II (see Figure 2).

EPA has determined that DOE has implemented all required response actions for these 22 properties and that no further response actions under CERCLA, other than operation, maintenance, and 5-year reviews, are

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necessary. DOE must conduct CERCLA 5-year reviews for the OU II Non-Surface and Ground-Water Impacted Peripheral Properties because contamination remains at certain properties above levels that allow unlimited use or unrestricted exposure.

## Partial Deletion Action

EPA has initiated the partial deletion process to remove the 22 OU II Non-Surface and Ground-Water Impacted Peripheral Properties from the National Priorities List. The remainder of the Monticello Mill Tailings Site may be deleted from the National Priorities List at a later date. The Utah Department of Environmental Quality concurs with the decision to delete this portion of the Monticello Mill Tailings Site provided no adverse comments are received during the public comment period.

DOE has prepared a deletion docket package containing all pertinent information that supports the partial deletion recommendation. The docket is available to the public at the information repositories listed in the adjacent column. The public has an opportunity to review this docket during the 30-day public comment period that follows publication of the Notice of Intent to Partially Delete and the Direct Final Notice of Partial Deletion in the *Federal Register*. The Notice of Intent to Partially Delete informs the public of EPA's intention to partially delete the site from the National Priorities List. The Direct Final Notice of Partial Deletion states that all appropriate response actions have been implemented and that remedial actions conducted at the OU II Non-Surface and Ground-Water Impacted Peripheral Properties to date are protective of public health and the environment. These notices are being published concurrently because EPA considers this action noncontroversial and routine.

The Direct Final Notice of Partial Deletion will be effective 60 days from the date of publication in the *Federal Register*, unless EPA receives significant adverse comments within 30 days of the date of publication. If such comments are received by EPA, EPA will publish a timely withdrawal of the Direct Final Notice of Partial Deletion in the *Federal Register* and inform the public that the notice will not take effect.

## Public Participation Activities

EPA will publish a notice in San Juan County newspapers announcing EPA's intent to partially delete the Monticello Mill Tailings Site from the National Priorities List and the dates for the 30-day public comment period. A news release detailing the

intended partial deletion of the site will also be prepared and distributed to San Juan County and Salt Lake City area news media.

Comprehensive information about the Monticello Mill Tailings Site is available for viewing and copying at the information repositories located at

U.S. Department of Energy  
Grand Junction Office  
Public Reading Room  
2597 B 3/4 Road  
Grand Junction, CO 81503  
Telephone: (970) 248-6089  
Toll-free: (800) 399-5618  
Hours: Monday through Friday, 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Monticello Repository Site Office  
7031 South Highway 191  
Monticello, UT 84535  
(435) 587-2098

Hours: Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.,  
or by appointment

To obtain more information regarding site deletion or to submit comments on the Direct Final Notice of Partial Deletion, contact

Paul Mushovic (8EPR-F)  
Remedial Project Manager  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 8  
999 18th Street, Suite 300  
Denver, CO 80202-2466  
Email: [mushovic.paul@epa.gov](mailto:mushovic.paul@epa.gov)  
Telephone: (303) 312-6662 or toll-free  
1-800-227-8917

## Information Contacts

For general site information, contact

Art Kleinrath  
Program Manager  
U.S. Department of Energy  
Grand Junction Office  
2597 B 3/4 Road  
Grand Junction, CO 81503  
Email: [art.kleinrath@gjo.doe.gov](mailto:art.kleinrath@gjo.doe.gov)  
Telephone: (970) 248-6037

David Bird  
Project Manager  
State of Utah Department of Environmental Quality  
168 North 1950 West  
Salt Lake City, UT 84116  
Email: [dgbird@utah.gov](mailto:dgbird@utah.gov)  
Telephone: (801) 536-4219